

Abby Adams
Library Director, Platt Memorial Library, Shoreham, VT

Testimony for the Working Group on the Status of Libraries:

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I think that volunteers get used too much in Vermont libraries, which is a direct result of lack of funding. We even still have libraries in the state that are totally run by volunteers. This represents a problem in several ways-- one, there's no accountability for practice. Two, a volunteer may or may not have any training in best practices. Three, a community may be getting an inconsistent or inequitable level of library service. To my mind, our person-to-person interactions are some of the most important in the library. If we truly want people to have access to information to educate and entertain, then we need the people with the most training to provide the majority of those interactions with the public. I think the Library Certificate program the state runs is a wonderful solution to the problem of lack of affordable access to MLIS programs. I would love to see the state sponsor the equivalent of an "associates" Library Certificate-- the full certificate program is designed to ensure that libraries are run by directors that have background in the principles and best practices of librarianship, but there are other staff who would benefit from some level of continuing education. I think this would be particularly useful if it were systematized; library assistants need training in reference interactions, reader's advisory, basic principles of cataloging and organization of information, as a start. Any library staff who provides programming for children should have some specialized education in childhood development and literacy development.

I think with the recent realignment of salaries across the state that librarians are starting to be better paid. In the last budget cycle I advocated for an increase in wages across the board and set starting salary points for a variety of different jobs that we might have in the library. Leadership from the state would be helpful, specifically in the form of minimum standards. We're still some of the lowest paid professionals in the country, but much of that has to do with our tradition of having small, underfunded libraries in every town, rather than larger hub libraries that serve more than one community. A small, underfunded library has a really hard time attracting a professional, degree-holding librarian who has experience running a complete program.

That's my 2 cents for now. I may send you more later. I hope it's useful!

Best,

Abby

Library Director